

Fulbright Fears War in Thailand

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Charges U.S. Hides Threat Of Big Conflict

Senator Quizzes Pentagon Aide on 'Credibility Gap'

Sen. J. W. Fulbright complained today that the Johnson administration is keeping Congress and the public in the dark about the threat of war in Thailand.

"We ought to know what we are getting into," Fulbright said as his Senate Foreign Relations Committee opened a hearing on the so-called "credibility gap" in the administration's public information policies.

Fulbright said he had been wrong in failing to challenge President Johnson's expansion of the Viet Nam war back in the days of the Tonkin Gulf incident two years ago.

It looks now as if the deepening U.S. military commitment in Thailand may lead the country into another conflict, but the administration refuses to discuss the question publicly, he said.

The Senate and the public have a right to know the implications of U.S. military operations in Thailand before a war erupts and the country is presented with an accomplished fact, he said.

"I don't want to be a rubber stamp," Fulbright said.

Unless the administration keeps the Foreign Relations

Committee informed, the Senate should "give up any pretense of being even a junior partner in the process of advice and consent" on foreign policy, the Arkansas Democrat said.

Sylvester on Stand

Fulbright was provoked when the leadoff witness, Assistant Defense Secretary Arthur Sylvester, declined to discuss the Thailand issue in public.

Sylvester said he agrees with Fulbright that the Senate should be consulted on foreign policy but said he would discuss Thailand only in a closed session of the committee.

The committee called the hearing to examine charges that the Defense Department and the administration generally attempt to "manage" the news of the Viet Nam war.

Sylvester denied that there is news management by the administration. He said the Defense Department always tells the whole truth about the war.

The only restrictions on coverage of the war are the voluntary agreements by reporters in Viet Nam to withhold information of value to the enemy until it is released, he said.

An example, he said, is delayed reporting of bomber flights until the planes return to their bases. There is no censorship and this is the most thoroughly reported war in history, he said.

The only management of news occurs in editorial offices of newspapers and television and radio stations, he said, adding that it always will be necessary for editors to exercise judgment about what news to print and how to report it.

Fulbright agreed that "news management" is exercised

mainly by editors, and that this is necessary.

But he charged that this editorial judgment too often is influenced by the government.

"Many prominent newspapers are almost agents or adjuncts of the government. They don't raise questions about policy," he said.

One explanation, he suggested, is that many big newspapers own television stations and so are "very sensitive" to the government's viewpoints because of TV licensing regulations.

Furthermore, he said, "the government has ways of being very flattering to the people who manage the news."

"You have a very friendly press here in Washington," Fulbright said, contending that there is very little criticism of the Defense Department in Washington newspapers.

"Don't you think it is quite remarkable how far the consensus has gone?" he asked.

"We've been belted here in Washington," Sylvester replied, adding that he sees no signs that the press is sensitive to the power of government regulation in television.

Defends Free Transportation

Sylvester defended a program under which the Pentagon gave free transportation to Viet Nam to 82 newsmen between July, 1964, and August, 1965.

When the program began, he said, there was relatively little news coverage of the war and the government decided to stimulate interest in order to keep the public informed.

Fulbright read from an Evening Star editorial of Aug. 24 as follows: "This newspaper, in

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common with most of the nations —major newspapers, makes it a practice —not to travel on government-provided transportation whenever there is commercial transportation available."

Sylvester said The Star did in fact accept government transportation to Viet Nam, even though commercial transportation was available.

There is nothing wrong with this, he maintained, telling Fulbright that there is not a single major newspaper in the country that has not accepted transportation.

Asked whether the Washington Post had accepted such favors, Sylvester said "an adjunct" of the Post, Newsweek magazine, did.

Fulbright said this information indicated that the editor of The Star "just didn't know what his own paper was doing," and remarked that The Star often is misinformed when it criticizes him editorially.

Clark's Charges

Sen. Joseph Clark, D-Pa., was rougher on Sylvester.

Clark said news policy in Viet Nam is "barbarous . . . manipulative . . . lacking in candor and largely responsible for the gap in credibility."

He said some reporters who received free transportation to Viet Nam wrote stories "pretty much as trained seals."

Sylvester said Clark was dead wrong and was libeling a large number of newsmen.

Fulbright again raised the issue of whether Sylvester said a government has a right to lie to save itself.

Sylvester denied ever making such a statement, and said "no government official ever has the right to lie."

However, he said, officials

have the duty to protect the country and in the nuclear age may be justified in withholding some information temporarily for security reasons.

Another Issue

Fulbright also questioned the propriety of having control of public information in Saigon under Barry Zorthian, whom he described as an official of the U.S. Information Agency.

Sylvester said Zorthian was detached from USIA about two years ago and now reports directly to the State Department.

It is unfair to criticize this arrangement, he said, because it is normal practice for the U.S. ambassador in any country to control public information operations.

Although Zorthian is in overall charge in Saigon, Sylvester said, military information is directed by Col. Rodger Bankson of the Army.

Sylvester said he knows of no basis for a charge by Wes Gallagher, general manager of the Associated Press, that Sylvester conducts a "guerrilla war" against American news correspondents in Viet Nam.

Gallagher has been "unhappy" with the Pentagon ever since the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, Sylvester said.

Sylvester denied as baseless charges that newsmen who write unfavorable stories are denied cooperation in covering the war in Viet Nam.

Sylvester Sees a Problem

There is a problem, he said, about stories and pictures presenting a distorted view of the war through dramatization of isolated incidents such as photos of soldiers abusing prisoners.

Fulbright quoted an opinion

poll that 67 percent of the American people believe the government only sometimes tells the truth about Viet Nam and 13 percent believe the truth is almost never told.

Sylvester questioned the validity of the poll.

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